

## 84 EMILE ZOLA, NOVELIST AND REFORMER

first gossip in "L'Eve'nement" two days later. In one important respect his articles differed from the theatrical gossip of the time. Much of the latter was paid for by managers or performers; whereas Zola neither sought nor accepted bribes from authors or publishers, but looked to "L'Eve'nement" for his entire remuneration. As mentioned previously, he had been engaged on trial, and thus no actual scale of payment had been arranged. When at the end of a month he called upon the cashier at "L'Eve'neinent" office he was both amazed and delighted to receive five hundred francs.<sup>1</sup>

Villemessant, for his part, was well pleased with the contributions. Though the time was not one of exceptional literary brilliancy, it had its interesting features, and the activity in the book-world was the greater as the first period of the Second Empire, that of personal rule, had not yet quite ended; the second period, that of the so-called "Empire liberal," dating only from the ensuing year, 1867. The French still possessed few liberties, the Government kept a strong curb on the political newspapers that were tolerated, and thus literature at least had a chance of attracting that wide attention of which politics so often despoil it. But it was also a degenerate time,

the time of  
Olodoché at the opera-balls, of Offenbach's  
"Orphée" and  
"La Belle Hélène." Only a few months  
previously (November, 1865), Victorien Sardou had produced his  
"Émile  
Benoiton," one of the very best of his many  
theatrical  
efforts, a stinging but truthful satire of some of  
the manners  
of the day, such as they had become in the  
atmosphere of  
the imperial régime\*

<sup>1</sup> Alexis, *l. o.*, p. 67.